

## Against the Grain

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Profile-Brian F. O'Leary

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We can't afford to build context into content after the fact. Doing so irrevocably truncates the deep relationships that authors and editors create and often maintain until the day, hour, or minute that containers render them impotent. Building back those lost links is redundant, expensive, and ultimately incomplete.

This isn't a problem of standards. At **Indiana University**, **Jenn Riley** and **Devin Becker** have vividly illustrated our abundance of contextual frameworks. The problem we face, the one we avoid at our peril, is implementing these standards.

Ultimately, that's a function of workflow.

If you want to change workflow, you are looking at the publishing equivalent of a heart transplant. And starting with context requires publishers to make fundamental changes in their content workflows.

At a time when we struggle to create something as simple as a clean ONIX feed, planning for and preserving connections to content is a challenge of significant proportion. New entrants are already upon us, and we don't have much time to get this new challenge right. But in a digital era, how publishers work is how they ultimately compete.

Although the precise changes in workflow will vary by publisher, certain principles apply. Moving from "product" to "service" or "solutions" means four things for publishers:

- Content must become open, accessible, and interoperable. Adherence to standards will not be an option;
- We'll need to focus more clearly on using context to promote discovery;
- Trying to compete with businesses that already use low- and no-cost tools is a losing proposition. We need to develop opportunities that encourage broader use of our content; and
- Publishers can distinguish ourselves by providing readers with tools that draw upon context to help them manage abundance.

Given these four implications, it seems clear that the publishing community will need new skill sets to compete in an era of abundance. We'll probably have to add a lot more training than we have ever done internally. Nevertheless, those aren't the toughest challenges. Changing workflow is.

It is a time of remarkable opportunity in publishing, one in which we are able to find and build upon strands of stories, in context. Yes, we face a significant challenge preparing for a very different world, but it is a challenge I think we have the insight and experience to meet. What we choose to do now will begin to determine which stories get told, as well as who writes — and publishes — them.

#### Author's Bio

**Brian O'Leary** is founder and principal of **Magellan Media**, a management consulting firm that works with publishers seeking support in content operations, benchmarking, and financial analysis. **O'Leary** writes extensively about issues affecting the publishing industry. With **Hugh McGuire**, he is editing "Book: A Futurist's Manifesto," a collection of forward-looking essays on publishing that is being published in three parts by **O'Reilly Media**. 🍄

## against the grain people profile

### Brian F. O'Leary

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**BORN AND LIVED:** Born in Melrose, Massachusetts. Grew up in Massachusetts and have lived in Chicago, New York, Singapore and New Jersey.

**EARLY LIFE:** Attended **St. John's Preparatory School** (Danvers, MA), **Harvard College** (Cambridge, MA) and Harvard Business School (Boston, MA)

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** From 1983 to 1995, various operational roles on three **Time Inc.** weeklies, including **TIME** magazine. From 1995 to 1998, senior vice president and associate publisher for **Hammond Inc.**, a reference publisher now owned by **Langenscheidt**. Since 1998, a consultant to magazine, book and association publishers.

**FAMILY:** Married to **Elizabeth W. McCarthy**; three children.

**IN MY SPARE TIME:** I try to golf and occasionally garden; have volunteered as an elected member of a board of education and a trustee of my high school.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *Look Homeward Angel* (**Thomas Wolfe**), *Out of Control* (**Kevin Kelly**), *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (**Tracy Kidder**).

**PET PEEVES:** I don't do too well with rudeness.

**PHILOSOPHY:** Socially liberal, fiscally conservative, but always in that order.

**MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Presenting "Context first," which had been illustrated by my oldest child, who is an artist, to an audience of 1,400 people at **O'Reilly Media's** "Tools if Change" conference in New York in 2011.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** To put some of my ideas to the test (in a non-consulting role), to write and publish at least one book, and to have at least one year during which I don't work on any Saturdays, Sundays, or holidays.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** In established markets, sales of physical and digital objects — containers — will be flat or fall slightly; prices will fall as well, putting pressure on most publishers. Unit growth in emerging markets will be more robust, but prices will not match those seen in the past in established markets. Cultivating global communities and meeting their content requirements will become a way for content producers to differentiate themselves. Success here will leverage increasingly sophisticated metadata and the enormous reach offered by the Internet. 🍄



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A special challenge for librarians is understanding what books mean to readers who rely on librarians to select, distribute, and pay for eBooks — or any book, for that matter. This is one of the recurrent themes in **Umberto Eco** and **Jean-Claude Carrière's** book *This is Not the End of the Book*. **Eco**, the author of *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, and *Theory of Semiotics*, and **Carrière**, a screen writer for **Godard** and **Bunuel**, speak at length about the book's future in the Internet age.

**Eco** and **Carrière** say many things comprehensible to librarians and many things that won't make sense. You would need to agree with **Nicholson Baker**, another author whose passion for the book often brings him in conflict with how librarians think and act. **Baker** is convinced that librarians can't be trusted to preserve knowledge through the book's legacy. **Eco**, for example, states immediately what he said almost two decades ago about the Internet, computers, and the book. The book, like the

spoon or the corkscrew is a technology at the limit of its form and expression. You can't make a better spoon, and you can't improve upon the book as a way to communicate themed and nuance information, at length, with some sobriety, style, and meaning.

This is very much an aesthetic, scholarly, intellectual, and humanitarian view of the book. Yet it does acknowledge the book as a basic unit in cultural memory and transmission. Read it to test your knowledge of incunabula in an electronic age. Memorize their photographs — faculty like these guys would cost you dearly in patron-driven purchase. They want it all...

#### Your Citation:

*This is Not the End of the Book: A Conversation Curated by Jean-Philippe de Tonnac*

Author: **Jean-Claude Carrière**; **Umberto Eco**; **Jean-Philippe de Tonnac** (London : Vintage, 2012.) 🍄